

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 6, 2023

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

We write in support of the State of Florida's request for a federal fishery disaster declaration in response to the severe impacts of Hurricane Idalia. We respectfully urge you to expeditiously approve the disbursement of disaster assistance to fishing and seafood businesses that have been disrupted and/or destroyed by the storm.

On September 5, 2023, the State of Florida submitted a request to the U.S. Department of Commerce to declare a federal fishery resource disaster pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Act, including clauses to initiate support from the Economic Development Administration, to support fishery businesses in response to Hurricane Idalia. As noted in the initial request, Florida's recreational saltwater fishing industry has a \$9.2 billion annual economic impact, and commercial fisheries total \$244 million in dockside value. Florida's Big Bend region, which was most severely impacted by Hurricane Idalia, is home to more than 600 commercial fishermen, 160 fishery wholesalers and retailers, 240 aquaculture shellfish farmers, and 450 for-hire charter captains. These small businesses need the federal government's expeditious assistance in order to recover from this Major Hurricane.

It is worth noting that the issuance of fishery resource disaster determinations has been unacceptably slow in recent years. Florida still awaits two determinations from previous requests of federal fishery resource disasters, including for Hurricanes Sally and Ian, which were submitted in December 2020 and October 2022, respectively. Delays in assistance hinder the survival of fishery businesses impacted by disasters. As such, we urge you to meet the deadlines requested in the Governor's September 5 letter for an interim response within 20 days, the complete review of the request within 120 days, and the issuance of a determination within 14 days of the completion of the review consistent with the requirements of the Fishery Resource Disasters Improvement Act. Further, we urge you to immediately approve an affirmative fishery resource disaster determination for Hurricane Sally, and to approve an affirmative fishery resource disaster determination, as soon as possible upon the receipt of requested data, which is currently being compiled, for Hurricane Ian.

Florida's iconic fisheries are foundational to the economy and way of life in many of the communities that have been devastated by Hurricane Idalia. A timely and robust response by the Department of Commerce, through the declaration of a fishery disaster in support of Florida's

fishing industries, is required to help these communities recover. We urge you to approve these declarations without delay.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott
U.S. Senator



Daniel Webster
Member of Congress



Kat Cammack
Member of Congress



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Anna Paulina Luna
Member of Congress



Brian Mast
Member of Congress



Michael Waltz
Member of Congress



Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress